

Absconders Policy

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Signed 

Chairman of Governors
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ABSCONDERS - THE SCHOOL'S RESPONSE & PRACTICE

At The Gateway School the safety and well-being of our pupils and staff is paramount. We are in a fortunate position of having excellent facilities on an expansive site. This means that we can offer a range of activities and experiences that our pupils otherwise would not have had the opportunity to encounter. However, this also means that pupils need to move around the site to access lessons and interventions (Forest School being just one example). In addition to this, the school site sits on land with many unused buildings and this can present a risk to pupils who choose to abscond. As our school population has grown we have had to respond to these possible risk and act accordingly. In the main, our activities are planned and risk-assessed accordingly (using the electronic EVC system or as part of teacher-led planning. However, due to the SEMH needs of our pupils sometimes individuals will abscond without warning. Outlined below is the range of measures we have put into policy to address these risks and mitigate against them.

Actions to be taken by staff when a pupil absconds:

On discovering or seeing a pupil has absconded, staff should:

1. Inform the Office and the Head teacher or the Deputy Head teacher
2. The office should record the details of the abscond (see Annex A)
3. Staff should ensure that the pupil is being followed/monitored
4. Staff should regularly update SLT and/or await instruction
5. Parents/carers should be contacted as soon as is appropriate
6. The police should be contacted in the event of a pupil being in imminent danger

Subsequent Actions

Following the above, the office should telephone the parent/carer of the missing pupil(s) informing them of the time and relevant circumstances of the absconson. This call will normally be made once the pupil has been missing for half an hour (or as soon as it is established that the pupil has definitely left the area) as it is often the case that a pupil will leave the building/premises and return after a relatively short period and we do not wish to needlessly alarm parents.

This does not mean however that parents/carers will not know that their pupil absconded at some point as an absconson is automatically regarded as a "Level 5" and, as such, means that a telephone call will be made home. The time at which the telephone call is made will also be influenced by factors such as lunch and taxi times, as pupils sometimes return at these times. It could be therefore that the time of the telephone call home is delayed as a result of the above or other similar factors.

When a pupil absconds at least one member of school staff should follow. Wherever possible they should have a means of contacting the main school office and if possible staff should swap to include relevant staff who form part of that particular child's 'team'.

If a pupil absconds and goes toward the A43 staff should monitor closely but should NOT directly follow as this often pushes the child further towards that road. In the event of a pupil continuing onto or along the A43 staff should contact the police (see below).

Informing the Police

In certain circumstances there will be considerable concern about the vulnerability of some pupils to various risks whilst out in the community or their susceptibility to commit an offence. When such a pupil absconds the Police should be informed (Tel. 01604 700700).

If a pupil has put themselves in an extremely high risk situation (such as being on the A43) staff should ring 999 immediately.

The Headteacher/Deputy Headteacher will ensure this takes place and that the pupil is reported as missing from school. Whoever makes the call should have as much information about the pupil available as possible, i.e. name, date of birth, address, parents/carers' names and telephone numbers, a description of the child concerned and, where possible, a list of what they were wearing when they left the premises. This information should be gathered in advance of the call being made, as this will better enable the police to do their job.

It is important that parents/carers, the Police and other interested parties are kept up to date of all developments and are given any new information that we may come by. This may help to minimise risk, reduce worry and enable the pupil to be found more quickly.

In all other circumstances there is no requirement to inform the police. In these cases parents should be informed that should their child not arrive home within an hour of their normal time, it is their responsibility to inform the police. This procedure has been drawn up in consultation with the police.

Stopping Absconders

In normal circumstances pupils will not be physically prevented from absconding. We aim to teach our pupils to make choices about their behaviour and this area is no exception. If, however, we have particular concerns about the vulnerability of a particular child based on our knowledge of them, their age, mental state and special needs, a physical intervention may well be deemed appropriate. This should take place on a case-by-case basis or in accordance with a particular child's individual behaviour plan.

Often it is very difficult to predict whether or not pupils intend to abscond as often it is an impulsive decision or as a response to the activities of other pupils in the school at the time. Our school has doors which are locked (by magnets) but they are not prison doors and they can be got through. In addition to this our interventions curriculum means that pupils need to access different parts of the site at various points of the school day. This is also true of when pupils exit and access school transport at the beginning and end of their school day. It is impossible for us to guarantee that pupils will not have an opportunity to abscond.

In the event of a pupil (s) absconding from school there are clear protocols for ensuring that they are tracked and returned to the safety of the school building as soon as possible. Geographically, the school is positioned in a rural area with very close proximity to an extremely busy, dualled road (A43). This is a major risk for pupils who may head that way having left the school site. In these instances staff should;

- inform the school that pupil (s) are in this area and keep school updated
- Follow the pupil(s) at a distance
- They should NOT run after the pupil(s) as this may push the pupil (s) further out onto the road
- try to engage the pupil (s) and encourage them back toward the school site
- Get help if required
- Ring 999 if the pupil (s) are actually on the A43
- In some instances, where it is clear that a pupil intends to run onto the road use Team Teach RPI to prevent this from happening

SLT should;

- Prioritise the response to pupils in this area and support staff
- Adapt individual risk assessments and responses accordingly

In addition to this hazard, the school is situated on the ST John's site which comprises large area much of which has been abandoned. As a result of this there are many buildings (not belonging to the school) which have been left to decay. These buildings are now beginning to pose a risk to our pupils as they are becoming increasingly easier to access and to hide in. In light of this, pupils who abscond onto the St John's side of the site should;

- Be followed/monitored by staff and encouraged to return to the school site
- Staff should inform the school of the whereabouts and actions of pupils

SLT should;

- Assist staff as appropriate
- Adapt individual risk assessments as appropriate
- Assess any possible damage to buildings etc.... and act accordingly (involving the police if necessary)
- Ensure that any safeguarding concerns are shared with the lead DSL and/or the relevant safeguarding agencies within the Local Authority
- Ensure that the facilities team are aware of any health and safety concerns in or around the school site which may pose a risk to pupil and staff safety. The facilities manager will inform the LA and relevant contracted bodies.

Below is a table showing our intervention activities and the actions generally taken to try and mitigate risk of absconding;

Intervention activity	Risk Mitigating action
Nurture group	Movement to and from main school is always accompanied by a t least one member of school staff. Pupil movement can also be monitored by the front office
Pupil support coordinator	Pre-planned intervention Generally no more than 2 pupils Routine and typicality
Forest School	Pre-planned intervention Risk assessment in place Generally very small groups (2 pupils) Routine and typicality Increased staffing when groups are bigger
Targeted support worker	Pre-planned intervention Generally no more than 2 pupils
Outreach	Pre-planned interventions Generally no more than 2 pupils Outreach staff assigned to individuals
VLC	Pre-planned interventions Member of staff assigned to monitor VLC building
Sports trips	Risk –assessed via EVC/system
Enrichment	Risk-assessed via EVC/system

School response to persistent absconders

Pupils are made aware of the dangers of absconding from school. As the level of absconding increase so too does the risk (to the pupil but also possibly to staff and other pupils). As a result , pupils who persistently abscond may receive a fixed term exclusion, be removed from interventions or , in extreme cases, may have to be taught off site or removed from school all together. In all cases parent/carers will need to come into school to meet and discuss the issues, responses and any appropriate solutions.

Pupils who put themselves at risk in this way will also have an individual risk assessment which will be available via Teams and individuals posing a risk to themselves and/or others will be identified at briefings and relevant stakeholders informed.

This policy will be reviewed by the senior leadership team every two years or if significant changes to the site, the curriculum or the pupil body happen.

Annex A

Week Commencing

[illegible]

